been amended so that they no longer contain brackets therein. Concerning newly added claims 18-19, these also find support in the application and are intended to recite that the detergent granules of claims 14-15 are "obtainable by" or "obtained by" dry-neutralizing as described in the specification, for example, at page 15, line 20 to page 17, line 1.

Claim Objections

Claims 1-4 were objected to based upon the occurrence of brackets "[]" therein. Claims 1-4 have been cancelled and replaced by newly added claims 14-17. Claims 14-17 do not contain brackets.

Claim Rejections Under 35 USC 102 and 35 USC 103

Claims 1-10 and 13 have been rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as being anticipated by Barletta et al. (US 4,919,847). Further, claims 2, 4-5, 8-10 and 13 have been rejected under 35 USC 102(a) as being anticipated by WO 99/00475. Still further, claims 1 and 3 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) over WO 99/00475. Reconsideration and withdrawal of each of these rejections is requested based upon the following considerations.

Present Invention and Its Advantages

The present invention provides detergent granules and detergent compositions which are prepared utilizing an advantageous inventive dry-neutralization process. The process is fully described in the application, e.g., see page 10, line 3 to 27, line 19.

In the inventive process, a step takes place wherein a liquid acid precursor of a non-soap anionic surfactant is dry-neutralized with a water-soluble, solid, alkali inorganic substance in the presence of an inorganic acid. By carrying out such a process, the present inventors are able to carry out neutralization and granulization concurrently and form neutralized detergent granules containing neutralized salts derived from the inorganic acids in relatively larger amounts at their surfaces than at their inner portions. Further, the resulting detergent granules have low tackiness and a small particle size, such that agglomeration of the granules can be advantageously controlled. Accordingly, advantageous and inventive detergent granules and detergent compositions can be prepared with the present inventive process.

WO 99/00475 (WO '475)

The cited WO 99/00475 reference's publication date is January 7, 1999. Thus, because Applicants' application has an international PCT filing date of September 3, 1997, it follows that the cited WO '475 reference is not applicable prior art under 35 USC 102 or 35 USC 103 against the present invention. The Examiner is respectfully requested to review 35 USC 363, which fully supports Applicants' contentions, and withdraw each of the outstanding rejections based on the WO '475 reference.

Distinctions Over Barletta et al.

The disclosure of Barletta et al. at best relates to an invention where an anionic synthetic organic detergent acid is reacted with a neutralizing agent to produce a corresponding neutralized detergent salt in a liquid or slurry state. Then the neutralized detergent salt in its liquid or slurry state is absorbed with particulate solid carrier particles such as bentonite in order to produce a detergent salt-carrier composition in particulate form. This is completely different from the inventive process being instantly claimed and is incapable of anticipating or rendering the same obvious.

For example, nowhere in the cited Barletta et al. reference is there described or otherwise provided a method like that instantly claimed, and nowhere in the Barletta et al. reference is there provided or disclosed a detergent composition or detergent granules as recited in the instant claims. More particularly, nowhere in the cited Barletta et al. reference is there disclosed or provided a method containing a dry-neutralizing step such as that recited in the instant claims, or is there disclosed or provided a detergent composition or detergent granules produced utilizing such a dry-neutralization step.

In the Office Action, Example 3 of Barletta et al., has been cited in support of the USPTO's determination of anticipation under 35 USC 102(b). However, in Example 3 of Barletta et al., the weight ratio of dodecylbenzene sulfonic acid to sulfuric acid is 91 : 7 (or 1 : 0.077), which equates to a molar ratio of 1:0.25. Similarly, the liquid acid (sulfuric acid):sodium carbonate ratio in Example 3 of Barletta et al. is 23:77. (See Col. 7, lines 52-53 and Col. 9, lines 41-48). A comparison of these ratios with the instant claims clearly shows that the Barletta et al. Example 3 composition is outside the

scope of the instant pending product claims (e.g., claims 15-16).

Accordingly, since Barletta et al. does not envision or otherwise provide any disclosure relating to a dry-neutralizing step during granule preparation and fails to provide for a detergent composition or detergent granules as instantly claimed, it follows that the produced detergent granules of Barletta et al. are not identical with the present invented detergent or detergent granules, and further that the Barletta et al. disclosure is incapable of rendering the instantly claimed invention unpatentable under 35 USC 102 or 35 USC 103.

Conclusion

Based upon the amendments and remarks presented herein, the Examiner is respectfully requested to issue a Notice of Allowance clearly indicating that each of the pending claims are allowed and patentable under the provisions of Title 35 of the United States.

Should there be any outstanding matters that need to be resolved in the present application, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact John W. Bailey (Reg. No. 32,881) at the telephone number of the undersigned below, to conduct an interview in an effort to expedite prosecution in connection with the present application.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. § 1.16 or under 37 C.F.R. § 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

BIRCH, STEWART, KOLASCH & BIRCH, LLP

By _____
John W. Bailey, #32,881

P.O. Box 747
Falls Church, VA 22040-0747
(703) 205-8000

kja
1422-0371P